

USING THE WEB AS A WEAPON: THE INTERNET AS A TOOL FOR VIOLENT
RADICALIZATION AND HOMEGROWN TERRORISM

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Terrorism has long been understood to be a violent means of communication. The terrorist act itself is thus deliberately designed to attract attention and then, through the publicity that it generates, to communicate a message. Indeed, nearly a quarter of a century ago, Alex Schmid and Janny de Graaf observed that, "Without communication there can be no terrorism."¹ But communication is essential for a terrorist movement not just to summon publicity and attention, but also to promote its longevity and ensure its very survival. Without an effective communications strategy, a terrorist movement would be unable to assure a continued flow of new recruits into its ranks, motivate and inspire existing members as well as expand the pool of active supporters and passive sympathizers from which terrorism also draws sustenance.

Given this constellation of requisite sustainable resources—motivated minions, energized recruits, generous supporters and willing sympathizers—it is not surprising that terrorists today devote so much time and energy to communications. That they have fastened on the Internet as an especially efficacious vehicle for this purpose—given its rapid (often in real time), pervasive geographical reach, and cost-effective characteristics—is not surprising either.² As Professor Gabriel Weimann of Haifa University notes in his seminal study, *Terror on the Internet*, when he began studying this phenomenon nearly a decade ago, there were only about 12 terrorist group web sites. By the time he

¹ Alex Schmid and Janny de Graaf, *Violence As Communication: Insurgent Terrorism and the Western News Media* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1982), p. 9.

² For a more detailed analysis of historical terrorist communications strategies and their contemporary use of the Internet and other electronic and digital communications means, see Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2nd edition, 2006), chapters 6 and 7, pp. 173-228.

completed his research in 2005, the number had grown to over 4,300—"a proliferation rate," he explains, "of about 4,500 percent per year."³ And, by the time the book was published the following year, the number had jumped to more than 5,000 terrorist web sites.⁴

Thus, virtually every terrorist group in the world today has its own Internet website and, in many instances, maintain multiple sites in different languages with different messages tailored to specific audiences. The ability to communicate in real time via the Internet, using a variety of compelling electronic media—including dramatic video footage, digital photographs, and audio clips accompanied by visually arresting along with savvy and visually appealing web design—has enabled terrorists to reach a potentially vast audience faster, more pervasively and more effectively than ever before.

The weapons of terrorism today, accordingly, are no longer simply the guns and bombs that they always have been, but now include the mini-cam and videotape, editing suite and attendant production facilities; professionally produced and mass-marketed CD-Roms and DVDs; and, most critically, the lap-top and desk-top computers, CD burners and e-mail accounts, and Internet and worldwide web. Indeed, largely because of the Internet—and the almost unlimited array of communications opportunities that it offers—the art of terrorist communication has now evolved to a point where terrorists can effortlessly and effectively control the communication of their ideology of hate, intolerance and violence: determining the content, context and medium over which their message is projected; and towards precisely the audience (or multiple audiences) they seek to reach.

The changing face of terrorism in the 21st Century is perhaps best exemplified by the items recovered by Saudi security forces in a raid during on an al Qaeda safe house in Riyadh in late spring 2004. In addition to the traditional terrorist arsenal of AK-47 assault rifles, explosives, rocket-propelled grenades, hand grenades, and thousands of

³ Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006), p. 105.

⁴ Remarks by Professor Gabriel Weimann, book launch event held at the U.S. Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C. on 17 April 2006.

rounds of ammunition that the authorities the police expected find, they also discovered an array of electronic consumer goods including: video cameras, laptop computers, CD burners, and the requisite high-speed Internet connection. According to "60 Minutes" investigative journalist Henry Schuster, the videos

had been part of an al Qaeda media blitz on the Web that also included two online magazines full of editorials and news digests, along with advice on how to handle a kidnapping or field-strip an AK-47 assault rifle. The videos mixed old appearances by bin Laden with slick graphics and suicide bombers' on-camera last wills and testaments. They premiered on the Internet, one after the other, and were aimed at recruiting Saudi youth.⁵

As Tina Brown, the doyenne of post-modern media, has pointed out: the "conjunction of 21st-century Internet speed and 12th-century fanaticism has turned our world into a tinderbox."⁶

The implications of this development have been enormous. The Internet, once seen as an engine of education and enlightenment, has instead become an immensely useful vehicle for terrorists with which to peddle their baseless propaganda and manifold conspiracy theories and summon their followers to violence.⁷ These sites alarmingly present an increasingly compelling and indeed accepted alternative point of view to the terrorists' variegated audiences. This was of course precisely al Qaeda's purpose in creating its first website, www.alneda.com, and maintaining a variety of successor sites ever since: to provide an alternative source for news and information that the movement itself could exert total control over. Identical arguments—claiming distortion and censorship by Western and other mainstream media—have also been voiced by sites either created by the Iraqi insurgent groups

⁵ Henry Shuster, "Studios of Terror: Al Qaeda's Media Strategy," *CNN International.Com, Tracking Terror*, 16 February 2005, accessed at <http://207.25.71.245/2005/WORLD/meast/02/15/schuster.column/index.html>.

⁶ Tina Brown, "Death by Error," *Washington Post*, 19 May 2005.

⁷ See, for instance, the "Iraq" tab at www.kavkazcenter.com and the "Iraqi Resistance Report" tab at www.jihadunspun.com as well as such sites as www.islammemo.cc/tagrer/one_news.asp?Idnew=292; www.la7odood.com; www.balagh.com/thaqafa/0604ggpz.htm; and www.albasrah.net: all accessed on 6 July 2005..

themselves or entities sympathetic to them.⁸ In addition, the Internet has become for terrorists a "virtual" sanctuary to compensate for the loss of their physical sanctuaries and continue to provide information on training and instruction in the means and methods of planning and executing terrorist attacks. Finally, the Internet's power to radicalize—to motivate, inspire, animate, and impel radicals to violence has been repeatedly demonstrated in the United States, Europe and elsewhere.

TERRORISM, RADICALIZATION, AND SUBVERSION

The process of radicalization—abetted, facilitated and encouraged by the Internet—however, is only side of a coin that critically also involves terrorist subversion. Consider what we have learned since the July 2005 bombings of mass transit in London that killed 52 persons and injured more than 700 others. Initially, British authorities believed that the attack was the work of disaffected British Muslims, self-radicalized and self-selected and operating entirely on their own and within the United Kingdom only. We have subsequently learned, however, that the London cell's ringleader, Mohammed Sidique Khan, and a fellow bomber, Shahzad Tanweer, both visited Pakistani jihadi and al Qaeda terrorist camps between November 2004 and February 2005—and, in fact, were trained at al Qaeda's Malakand camp in the lawless tribal area along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.⁹

Both men also recorded "martyrdom" videos while in Pakistan that were subsequently released in September 2005 and then on the first anniversary of the bombings by al Qaeda's perennially active

⁸ "Western Propaganda Media try to shut down albasrah.net! [sic]," the banner on one such site, www.albasrah.net, asserted in 2005. "Once again," it argued, "the propaganda media have begun to spew stupid accusations against al-Basrah, the true aim of which is to smother the voice of Iraqi people and smother one of the few sources of information on the unprecedented massacres that are taking place inside occupied Iraq in the name of 'international law'." www.albasrah.net accessed on 6 July 2005.

⁹ See Honourable House of Commons, *Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005*, pp. 20-21; and, Robert Winnett and David Leppard, "Leaked No 10 Dossier Reveals Al Qaeda's British Recruits," *Sunday Times* (London), July 10, 2005.

•communications department, "Al Sahab •[the Clouds] for Media Production." On those tapes, Ayman al Zawahiri also claims credit for the London attack in the name of al Qaeda: an admission that at the time was mostly dismissed given that it challenged the conventional wisdom that al Qaeda was no longer capable of such operations.

In addition, following the bombings, when Khan's photograph was a staple of nightly British newscasts and on the front page of daily newspapers, a reliable source working for Britain's security service claimed to have seen Khan at an al Qaeda camp in Afghanistan in either 1999 or •2000.¹⁰ Finally, a BBC documentary broadcast in July 2006 reported that during the summer of 2001 Khan was seen •trawling Britain's Muslim communities for recruits to• al Qaeda—accompanied by •two other British Muslims who would later •stage a suicide bombing in Israel in April •2003. • And, only a month before that attack, Khan himself visited Israel—taking the same route via Jordan that the bombers would soon follow—in what may have been a practice or dry-run for the operation.¹¹

The London bombing's pedigree, moreover, is familiar. Exactly a year earlier, British and American authorities had thwarted another plot by a London-based al Qaeda cell to simultaneously carry out suicide attacks on the New York Stock Exchange and CitiGroup building in Manhattan, the Prudential Center in Newark, New Jersey, and the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank headquarters in Washington, D.C. The trail in this foiled operation similarly led back to Pakistan. It emerged that a protégé of the 9/11 mastermind, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, operating in Lahore was the essential nexus between the London cell and al Qaeda commanders operating out of Waziristan.

And, a parallel plot disrupted only months before, in April 2004, likewise involved a group of British Muslims of Pakistani ancestry.

¹⁰ See Intelligence and Security Committee, *Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005*, p. 16.

¹¹ A UK Muslim community leader interviewed in the documentary said that he was approached by Mohammed Khan, who was accompanied by two other British Muslims named Asif Hanif and Omar Khan Sharif, who in 2003 would stage a suicide attack on a seaside pub in Tel Aviv, Israel. See BBC News Media Exchange, "Britain's First Suicide Bombers," "Panorama," broadcast on BBC2 on July 11, 2006, 2000 GMT.

Their plan was to bomb a shopping mall or—exactly like last June’s botched car bomb attack—a London nightclub using 1,300 pounds of ammonium nitrate fertilizer they had stockpiled with which to fabricate their explosives. The leader of the cell, Omar Khyam, had also traveled to Pakistan for terrorist training at the same al Qaeda facility in Malakand that two of the July 2005 bombers were trained at. Khyam, admitted that while in Pakistan he had met with al Qaeda commanders and that his al Qaeda controller for the operation was Abdul Hadi al-Iraqi: the then supposed new “number three” figure in the movement and a key liaison officer with the al Qaeda organization in Iraq. Khyam’s claims were corroborated by another cell member, Mohammed Junaid Babar, who became a witness for the prosecution. Babar, a naturalized U.S. citizen who had emigrated from Pakistan as a young child, himself confessed to having attended an al Qaeda “summit” meeting held in Pakistan in March 2004 that was devoted to planning international terrorist operations.

Finally, the foiled August 2006 plot to simultaneously bomb ten U.S. airliners and crash them into targets over American cities was derailed after arrests in Pakistan once more led U.K. and U.S. officials to yet another terrorist cell of British Muslims of Pakistani heritage. That operation’s controller was none other than Abu Ubaydah al-Masri: the commander for al Qaeda in Kunar Province, Afghanistan. Just as disturbing is the fact that these attacks were not directed against the softer, more accessible targets like subway and commuter trains, hotels and tourist destinations that the conventional wisdom held a de-graded al Qaeda only capable of: but against arguably the most internationally-hardened target set since 9/11—commercial aviation. This alarming development calls into question some of our most fundamental assumptions about al Qaeda’s capabilities and intentions—and indeed our ability to deter them—given that the movement continues to evidence the same grand homicidal ambitions it demonstrated on 9/11.

Rather than solely the product of radicalization then, this concatenation of plots and attacks actually represents the fruition of strategic decisions made by al Qaeda a decade ago. As far back as 1999, British authorities already knew of al Qaeda’s years-long subversive activities among that country’s Muslim community: having concluded that

some 3,000 British Muslims had left and returned to the United Kingdom during the latter part of the 1990s after receiving terrorist training at al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and elsewhere.¹² The Netherlands' intelligence and security service similarly called attention to increased terrorist recruitment efforts among assimilated Dutch Muslim youths in its 2002 report to the Dutch Parliament. The service detailed the increased terrorist recruitment activities among Muslim youth living in the Netherlands whom it was previously assumed had been completely assimilated into Dutch society and culture.¹³ Thus, representatives of Muslim extremist organizations—including, presumably, al Qaeda—had succeeded in embedding themselves in, and were already in the process of drawing new sources of support from, receptive elements within established Diaspora communities.

In this way, new recruits could be brought into the movement who would likely had not previously come under the scrutiny of local or national law enforcement agencies. Indeed, according to the aforementioned BBC News documentary, Khan, the 2005 London bombing cell's ringleader, may have acted precisely as such an al Qaeda "talent spotter": trawling Britain's Muslim communities during the summer of 2001—literally weeks before 9/11—seeking to attract new recruits to the movement.¹⁴ Finally, senior officials in Spain's Interior Ministry and Foreign Ministry have told me that they now suspect that prior to 9/11 somewhere between a couple hundred and perhaps as many as a thousand Muslims living in Spain similarly were recruited to travel overseas to receive training in al Qaeda camps before returning to Spain. The threat, therefore, is not just of jihadi radicalization, but of deliberate, longstanding al Qaeda subversion.

¹² Robert Winnett and David Leppard, "Leaked No 10 Dossier Reveals Al Qaeda's British Recruits," *Sunday Times* (London), July 10, 2005.

¹³ See General Intelligence and Security Service, *Recruitment for the Jihad in the Netherlands: From Incident to Trend* (The Hague: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, December 2002).

¹⁴ A UK Muslim community leader interviewed in the documentary said that he was approached by Mohammed Khan, who was accompanied by two other British Muslims named Asif Hanif and Omar Khan Sharif, who in 2003 would stage a suicide attack on a seaside pub in Tel Aviv, Israel. See BBC News Media Exchange, "Britain's First Suicide Bombers," broadcast on BBC2 on July 11, 2006, 2000 GMT.

This recruitment of locally radicalized individuals into the ranks of al Qaeda and other international terrorist organizations has proven more difficult for the authorities in these countries to track, predict and anticipate. Sir David Pepper, the director of Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), Britain's equivalent of our National Security Agency (NSA) admitted this in testimony before a House of Commons committee investigating the 7/7 attacks. "We had said before July [2005], there are probably groups out there that we do not know anything about," Sir David explained,

and because we do not know anything about them we do not know how many there are. What happened in July [viz., the 2005 London bombings] was a demonstration that there were . . . conspiracies going on about which we essentially knew nothing, and that rather sharpens the perception of how big, if I can use [Secretary of Defense Donald] Rumsfeld's term, the unknown unknown was.¹⁵

These recruits have also proven extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the authorities to effectively profile.¹⁶ Although the members of such terrorist cells may be marginalized individuals working in menial jobs from the lower socio-economic strata of society, some with long criminal records or histories of juvenile delinquency; others may well come from solidly middle and upper-middle class backgrounds with university and perhaps even graduate degrees and prior passions for cars, sports, rock music and other completely secular, material interests. For example, in the case of radicalized British Muslims, since 9/11 we have seen terrorists of South Asian and North African descent as well as those hailing both from the Middle East and Caribbean. They have included lifelong devout Muslims as well as recent converts; persons from the margins of society who made a living as thieves or from drug dealing, as well as students from solid middle class and upper-middle class backgrounds who had attended such distinguished British universities as the London School Economics and

¹⁵ Quoted in Intelligence and Security Committee, *Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005*, pp. 30-31.

¹⁶ The report concluded that "The July attacks emphasized that there was no clear profile of a British Islamist terrorist." See *Ibid.*, p. 29.

King's College, London.¹⁷ What they will have in common is a combination of a deep commitment to their faith—sometimes recently rediscovered; an admiration of Bin Laden for the cathartic blow struck against America on 9/11; a hatred of the United States, the United Kingdom and the West; and, a profoundly shared sense of alienation from their host countries. These radicalized individuals are thus readily manipulated, influenced, exploited and then harnessed by al Qaeda "talent spotters" for the execution often of suicide terrorist operations. "There appear to be a number of common features to this grooming," the report of the Intelligence and Security Committee of the House of Commons concluded.

In the early stages, group conversation may be around being a good Muslim and staying away from drugs and crime, with no hint of an extremist agenda. Gradually individuals may be exposed to propaganda about perceived injustices to Muslims across the world with international conflict involving Muslims interpreted as examples of widespread war against Islam; leaders of the Muslim world perceived as corrupt and non-Islamic; with some domestic policies added as 'evidence' of a persecuted Islam; and conspiracy theories abounding. They will then move on to what the extremists claim is religious justification for violent jihad in the Quran and the Hadith . . . and—if suicide attacks are the intention—the importance of martyrdom in demonstrating commitment to Islam and the rewards in Paradise for martyrs; before directly inviting an individual to engage in terrorism. *There is little evidence of overt compulsion. The extremists appear rather to rely on the development of individual commitment and group bonding and solidarity [my emphasis].*¹⁸

These new recruits are the anonymous cogs in the worldwide al Qaeda enterprise and include both longstanding residents and new immigrants found across Europe, but specifically in countries with large expatriate

¹⁷ For instance, in the criminal category are Richard Reid (the so-called "shoe bomber," who attempted to blow up an American Airlines flight en route from Paris to Miami in December 2001) and Jermaine Lindsay (one of the 7/7 London bombers), while Omar Saed Sheikh (who orchestrated the kidnapping and murder of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl in 2002) is a graduate of the LSE and Omar Sharif Khan (one of the two British Muslims who carried out a suicide bombing attack against a seaside pub in Tel Aviv, Israel in April 2003) attended the University of London.

¹⁸ Honourable House of Commons, *Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005*, pp. 31-32.

Muslim populations such as Britain, Spain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Belgium.

Thus, al Qaeda's goal remains as it has always been: to inspire radicalized Muslims across the globe to join the movement's holy fight. Not only does al Qaeda retain its core operational and command-and-control capabilities, it has shown remarkable resiliency and a stubborn capacity for renewal and regeneration. Even though its personnel may be dispersed, al Qaeda remains a hierarchal organization: capable of ordering, planning and implementing bold terrorist strikes. This was precisely the conclusion reached by Senior British intelligence and security officials and publicly stated in October 2006. And, in a speech delivered the following month by Dame Eliza Manningham-Buller, then director-general of the Security Service (MI-5), she was unequivocal in her assessment of the threat posed by al Qaeda. "We are aware of numerous plots to kill people and to damage our economy," Dame Eliza stated. "What do I mean by numerous? Five? Ten? No, nearer 30 that we currently know of," she continued. "These plots often have linked back to al Qaeda in Pakistan and through those links al Qaeda gives guidance and training to its largely British foot soldiers here on an extensive and growing scale."¹⁹ Indeed, al Qaeda has been involved in virtually every other major terrorist plot unmasked or actual attack in the United Kingdom since 2003.²⁰

¹⁹ Quoted in BBC News, "Extracts from MI5 Chief's Speech," November 10, 2006 accessed at <http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/2/h1/news/6135000.stm>.

²⁰ These include the so-called "ricin plot" in January 2003 involving an Algerian al Qaeda operative named Kamal Bourgass and what British authorities refer to as "Operation Crevise" and "Operation Rhyme," as well as this past summer's abortive plot to crash ten U.S. airliners into American cities. See Elaine Sciolino and Don Van Natta, Jr., "2004 British Raid Sounded Alert on Pakistani Militants," *The New York Times*, July 14, 2005; and idem., "Europe Confronts Changing Face of Terrorism," *The New York Times*, August 1, 2005; Sebastian Rotella, "British Terrorism Case Parallels Others; Trial in a suspected plot to bomb a nightclub or mall in 2004 involves alleged home-grown Islamic radicals with ties to militants in Pakistan," *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 2006; and BBC News, "Man Admits UK-US Terror Bomb Plot," October 12, 2006 accessed at http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6044.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: A WAY AHEAD?

Al Qaeda may be compared to the archetypal shark in the water that must keep moving forward—no matter how slowly or incrementally—or die. In al Qaeda's context, this means adapting and adjusting to even our most consequential countermeasures while simultaneously searching to identify new targets and vulnerabilities and continuing to replenish its ranks with new recruits as well as sympathizers and supporters. In sum, Qaeda's capacity to continue to prosecute this struggle is also a direct reflection of both the movement's resiliency and the continued resonance of its ideology and effectiveness of its communications.

Defeating al Qaeda suggests first and foremost that our assessments and analyses must be anchored firmly to sound empirical judgment and not blinded by conjecture, mirror-imaging, politically partisan prisms and wishful thinking. Second is the need to refocus our attention and efforts back to South Asia—to Pakistan and Afghanistan, specifically—where it was following 9/11 and when al Qaeda was indeed on the run. Third is the recognition that al Qaeda cannot be defeated with military means alone. As one U.S. intelligence officer with vast experience in this realm told me over two years ago: "We just don't have enough bullets to kill them all." Accordingly, a new strategy and new approach is needed given a resuscitated al Qaeda organization that relies as much upon clandestine subversion of targeted communities as it does upon propaganda and radicalization. Its success will depend on effectively combining the tactical elements of systematically destroying and weakening enemy capabilities alongside the equally critical, broader strategic imperatives of countering the continued resonance of the movement's message and breaking the cycle of terrorist recruitment and replenishment that has both sustained and replenished al Qaeda.

The war on terrorism has now lasted longer than America's involvement in World War II. Yet, even today we cannot claim with any credibility, much less, acuity to have fulfilled Sun Tzu's timeless admonition.²¹ Indeed, what remains missing six years since this war

²¹ I have been making this same argument since I testified on this same issue before Congress in 2005. See, for instance, Bruce Hoffman, *Combating Al Qaeda and the Militant Islamic Threat* (Santa Monica, CA:

began is a thorough, systematic understanding of our enemy: encompassing motivation as well as mindset, decision-making processes as well as command-and-control relationships; and ideological constructs as well as organizational dynamics.

Forty years ago, the United States understood the importance of building this foundation in order to effectively counter an enigmatic, unseen enemy motivated by a powerful ideology who also used terrorism and insurgency to advance his cause and rally popular support. Although America, of course, encountered many frustrations during the Vietnam conflict, a lack of understanding of our adversary was not among them. Indeed, as early as 1965, the Pentagon had begun a program to analyze Vietcong morale and motivation based on detailed interviews conducted among thousands of guerrilla detainees. These voluminous detailed studies provided a roadmap of the ideological and psychological mindset of that enemy, clearly illuminating the critical need to win what was then often termed the "other war"—the ideological struggle for the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people.²² Even if the fundamental changes required in U.S. military strategy to overcome the Vietcong's appeal went ignored, tremendous effort and resources were devoted to understanding the enemy.

Today, Washington has no such program in the war on terrorism. America's counterterrorism strategy continues to assume that America's contemporary enemies—be they al Qaeda or the insurgents in Iraq—have a traditional center of gravity. It also assumes that these enemies simply need to be killed or imprisoned so that global terrorism or the Iraqi insurgency will both end. Accordingly, the attention of the U.S.

RAND Corporation, CT-255, 2006, 2005) available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT255>.

²² The RAND Corporation actively contributed to these analyses in a series of detailed reports, based on voluminous interviews of captured Vietcong. See, for example: Leon Gouré, Anthony Russo, and D. Scott, *Some Findings of the Viet Cong Motivation and Morale Study: June-December 1965* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, RM-4911-12-ISA/ARPA, February 1966); Leon Gouré, J. M. Carrier, and D. Scott, *Some Findings of the Viet Cong Motivation and Morale Study: January-June 1966* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, RM-5137-ISA/ARPA, February 1966); J. M. and Charles Thomson, *Viet Cong Motivation and Morale: The Special Case of Chieu Hoi* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, RM-4830-2-ISA/ARPA, May 1966); J. C. Connell, *Viet Cong Motivation and Morale: A Preliminary Report* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, RM-4507/2-ISA, July 1968).

military and intelligence community is directed almost uniformly towards hunting down militant leaders or protecting U.S. forces—not toward understanding the enemy we now face. This is a monumental failing not only because decapitation strategies have rarely worked in countering mass mobilization terrorist or insurgent campaigns, but also because al Qaeda's ability to continue this struggle is ineluctably predicated on its capacity to attract new recruits and replenish its resources.

The success of U.S. strategy will therefore ultimately depend on Washington's ability to counter al Qaeda's ideological appeal and thus effectively address the three key elements of al Qaeda's strategy:

- the continued resonance of their message;
- their continued ability to attract recruits to replenish their ranks; and,
- their stubborn capacity for continual regeneration and renewal.

To do so, we first need to better understand the mindset and minutia of the al Qaeda movement, the animosity and arguments that underpin it and indeed the regions of the world from which its struggle emanated and upon which its hungry gaze still rests. Without knowing our enemy we cannot successfully penetrate their cells; we cannot knowledgeably sow discord and dissension in their ranks and thus weaken them from within; we cannot effectively counter their propaganda and messages of hate and clarion calls to violence; and, we cannot fulfill the most basic requirements of an effective counterterrorist strategy: preempting and preventing terrorist operations and deterring their attacks. Until we recognize the importance of this vital prerequisite, America will remain perennially on the defensive: inherently reactive rather than proactive, deprived of the capacity to recognize, much less anticipate, important changes in our enemy's modus operandi, recruitment and targeting.